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Fronza, Catia; Becker Karnopp, Lodenir; Tammenga-Helmantel, Marjon

Published in:
Caleidoscopio

DOI:
[10.4013/cld.2018.161.16](https://doi.org/10.4013/cld.2018.161.16)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2018

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Fronza, C., Becker Karnopp, L., & Tammenga-Helmantel, M. (2018). L1/L2 use in the language classroom: A multi-perspective dialogue. *Caleidoscopio*, 16(1), 172-175. <https://doi.org/10.4013/cld.2018.161.16>

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Entrevista

L1/L2 use in the language classroom: A multi-perspective dialogue¹

Uso de L1 e L2 em sala de aula: um diálogo de múltiplas perspectivas

Cátia de Azevedo Fronza²

catiaaf@unisinos.br

Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos

Lodenir Becker Karnopp³

lodenir.karnopp@ufrgs.br

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel⁴

m.a.tammenga-helmantel@rug.nl

University of Groningen

Interviewee

Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel is a teacher trainer and methodologist for German as a foreign language at the University of Groningen (RUG), Netherlands, and carries out research in the field of foreign language pedagogy. Her areas of expertise are grammar instruction, target language use, (inter)cultural competence, and the analysis and reception of teaching materials. She is a member of the Dutch interuniversity team of experts for teaching modern foreign languages. Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel was a visiting scholar at the Universidade de Brasília in 2014 and 2016. Since 2016, she has been a member of *Grupo Interinstitucional de Pesquisa em Educação de Surdos* and *Grupo Aquisição e desenvolvimento da linguagem: relações entre fala e escrita*.

Interviewers

Cátia de Azevedo Fronza is a professor at the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos) in the Applied Linguistics Graduate Program. She has experience in speech acquisition, learning of writing and the implications of these processes in language teaching and learning. She conducts research primarily in the contexts of deaf education and the linguistic component in inclusive education.

Lodenir Becker Karnopp is a professor at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in the Department of Specialized Studies and in the Graduate Program in Education. She has particular expertise on cultural studies in education, with emphasis on Brazilian sign language and deaf education. She received a grant from the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) to conduct research on bilingual school education for the deaf.

The interview presented here took place via email. It presents the research interests of Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel and explores the possibilities for cooperation across research domains. The exchange between our different areas of expertise, viz. foreign language pedagogy and second language acquisition in deaf education, has proved fruitful: (i) it resulted in joint publications; (ii) Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel became a member of two Brazilian research groups (*Grupo Interinstitucional de Pesquisa em Educação de Surdos* and *Grupo Aquisição e desenvolvimento da linguagem: relações entre fala e escrita*); and, (iii) Cátia de Azevedo Fronza was granted the opportunity to be a visiting scholar at the University of Groningen (CAPES, Process n. 2747/15-4) in 2016.

Cátia de Azevedo Fronza (CAF) and Lodenir Becker Karnopp (LBK): The importance of using the

¹ Our acknowledgements to PhD Marcia de Oliveira Del Corona (Unisinos) for reviewing this text and for her comments and suggestions.

² Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos. Av. Unisinos, 950, Cristo Rei, 93022-750, São Leopoldo, RS, Brasil.

³ Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Av. Paulo Gama, 110, Farroupilha, 90040-060, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

⁴ University of Groningen. Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, 9712 TS Groningen, Netherlands.

target language in the foreign classroom seems so obvious. What triggered you to explore this topic?

Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel (MTH): Using the target language (L2) in foreign language teaching seems obvious, indeed, but this is not what we encounter in the foreign language classroom. In the Netherlands, foreign language teaching generally takes place in L1, that is, in Dutch (Bonnet, 2002; Kordes and Gille, 2012). As a teacher educator, I observe that my students have a hard time in their apprenticeship schools. They are becoming teachers for secondary education, which is a tough job to begin with: they must accept a new role and develop their interpersonal, organizational and pedagogical skills. In addition, they are – as language teachers – encouraged to teach in the foreign language, which is rather challenging. Therefore, target language use is frequently discussed in weekly meetings with students and supervisors. As teacher educators for modern foreign languages, our team has developed both practical and reflective tasks on translanguaging to support our student teachers in this process.

One of the main reasons for me to investigate target language use is to monitor this process of our student teachers over time and see what the effect is of the input we provide as teacher educators. We followed 30 student teachers, mainly for English as a foreign language (EFL), and saw that they generally use the target language most often in senior classes. Moreover, they enhance their L2 use during the teacher training period, especially in junior classes, that is, when the learners have just started learning the foreign language (Tammenga-Helmantel and Mossing Holsteijn, 2016). Case studies of three EFL student teachers reveal that both teacher-internal and teacher-external factors hinder L2 use (Tammenga-Helmantel *et al.*, in prep.). On the one hand, they do not in all cases feel well-prepared because they do not consider themselves pedagogically and linguistically competent. On the other hand, they miss support in their schools from colleagues and encounter unwillingness and limited L2 proficiency with their students. All three student teachers mention the stimulating role of teacher training (Tammenga-Helmantel *et al.*, in prep.).

Surprisingly, experienced Dutch language teachers too struggle with the implementation of L2 use in their teaching: they want more target language use and interaction in their classrooms, but for some reason they do not manage it or give up after several tries (Haijma, 2013; Oosterhof *et al.*, 2014). At the moment, we are analyzing data from teachers of German as a foreign language in order to determine for experienced teachers how much they use L2 and how much L2 use they consider desirable. In addition, we want to know what factors hinder and stimulate L2 use. These outcomes can help us to identify the zone of proximal development, that is, the next step to be taken by the teachers to elevate their L2 use and use it in a well-balanced and thoughtful way.

CAF and LBK: Is L2 use really that important?

MTH: If teachers want to prepare their students to communicate in real life situations with foreign language speakers, practicing the use of the foreign language seems self-evident. Ellis (2005) considers L2 use as one of the guiding principles of present-day communicative foreign language teaching. Teachers should provide, among other things, input, output, and interaction in L2. However, caution is called for since exclusive use of the target language does not seem to be the way to go since teachers and researchers have also indicated the advantages of L1 use supporting L2 learning (e.g. Garcia, 2012; Lau *et al.*, 2017; Hall and Cook, 2013; Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009). We have conducted a review study investigating empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of L1 and L2 use in the foreign language classroom (Tammenga-Helmantel *et al.*, 2016). To our surprise, not much empirical research on this topic is available. Our study shows that L2 use fosters especially the receptive language skills and positively influences classroom climate and learner motivation. L1 use, on the other hand, makes student-teacher and student-student communication more natural, fosters building rapport and reduces anxiety. Our results thus show that dogmatic L2 is not desirable. We plead for teachers to use the two languages in a purposeful, strategic, and balanced way.

CAF and LBK: What are the practical implications of your research?

MTH: I would like to point out that my research on target language use is in the first place framed by teaching practice. It is the above-mentioned struggle which I observe with my students and experienced foreign language teachers alike that aroused my interest in this topic. Their concerns and challenges in teaching trigger me to investigate L1/L2 use, that is, clarify the context and explore possibilities to support teachers, and, in so doing, contribute to foreign language teaching practice.

A concrete example of how my research may help foreign language teachers is the following. I intend to use the outcomes of my investigations in in-service teacher training. In January 2018, I will start a professional community of about ten teachers of German and French to help them diagnose their L2 use, that is, determine their L2 use and make them aware of their L1 and L2 use. Additionally, I intend to support them to develop a stance on translanguaging and integrate their ideas in concrete teaching. The results of my research can also help me and my colleagues to improve our pre-service teacher education program. When we know what student teachers consider difficult and where they need help, we can adjust our teaching. Our teacher training program contains several forms of support for L2 use, and now that we know what student teachers need, we can fine-tune our input.

CAF and LBK: How can insights from your research contribute to language teaching in Brazil?

MTH: My research shows how much Dutch foreign language teachers use the target language in their classroom and which factors hinder and foster L2 use. The results display the situation in FL teaching in the Netherlands, but may well be transferable since the observed stimulating and hindering factors have been partly confirmed in international studies too, e.g. Hall and Cook (2013) and Batemann (2008). These factors may well hold for Brazilian language teachers in that they have the same concerns and needs when using L2 in their teaching. I would suggest reduplication of our study in a Brazilian context to verify this assumption.

Another domain which could profit from our research is the discussion of bilingual education for deaf in Brazil. Analogous to the belief of Dutch teachers that L2 use is very relevant and fosters FL learning, the Brazilian deaf movement and Brazilian applied linguists have promoted a bilingual approach in deaf schools: both Libras and Portuguese are used when teaching deaf students their second language, Brazilian Portuguese. Studies in deaf schools have shown that bilingual teaching positively influences students' well-being, identity development, and motivation (see Karnopp *et al.*, 2016; Müller, 2016), which pleads for a bilingual approach in deaf education. However, we do not know yet, how successful deaf students are. That is to say, no data are available concerning student outcomes and drop-out rates, see Fronza *et al.* (in press). More quantitative empirical research must be done to see whether they can confirm the success of bilingual teaching and, in so doing, could elevate deaf education in Brazil.

CAF and LBK: And how do you think Brazilian researchers and Brazilian studies can contribute to the studies that you develop at your university?

MTH: My research focuses mainly on teacher behavior and has a quantitative orientation. My impression is that your studies on bilingual education consider language teaching from a student perspective, viz. their well-being, motivation, and identity development. Adding the student perspective to my research would definitely broaden and enrich it. Another point is the practical support you provide teachers with, viz. developing teaching materials that accord with research findings, such as the ULBRA fairy tale series (Rosa and Karnopp, 2005a, 2005b; Silveira *et al.*, 2003; Hessel *et al.*, 2003). Such concrete help to teachers is missing in my work and this step would help teachers implement new ideas in their teaching. We need materials that foster purposeful and strategic L1 and L2 use.

CAF and LBK: You have already mentioned some very relevant perspectives in terms of L1/L2 use in the language classroom, but before we close our conversation, we would like to hear from you what you

think needs to be further investigated considering future research in this area.

MTH: So far, our focus has been on factors hindering L2 use. This was legitimate in a teaching context where hardly any L2 was heard in the language classroom. But in order to change this, we need to investigate what factors have a positive impact on L2 use and especially, how they influence translanguaging in the language classroom. So-called good practices of 'successful' language teachers might inspire and empower other language teachers. Translanguaging promotes a purposeful and strategic use of two languages, that is, both L1 and L2 (Lau *et al.*, 2017, p. 102). Depending on the teaching objectives and the students' aims, interests and (linguistic) skills, teachers must be able to make a well-considered choice in L1/L2 use, in that some classroom activities should be in L1 whereas others are preferably executed in L2. Classroom observations can help clarifying L1/L2 classroom practice (e.g. Wolthuis *et al.*, in prep.). In addition, research should investigate its effectiveness. In so doing, it supports teachers in making well-considered and evidence-based choices in their teaching.

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